



Teaching and Learning Styles: A Cultural Reflection

Dr. Kristen Pennycuff Trent



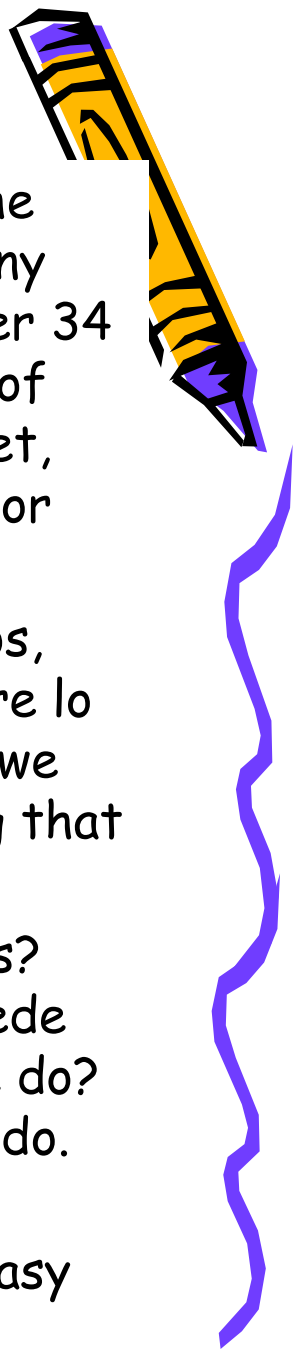
Scenario

Ms. Peters teaches a first-grade bilingual class and adores the beautiful children she sees in front of her. She has spent many years learning Spanish, and this is her first bilingual class. Her 34 students are almost all from Puerto Rico, with the exception of one child, who is from Peru. She has no teacher's assistant yet, but she has invested a lot of time in organizing and planning for instruction, so she feels well prepared.

She chooses an assignment to get to know her children. "Ninos, vamos a hacer algo muy divertido. Hagan un dibujo que muestre lo que hicieron durante sus vacaciones este verano." ("Children, we are going to do something that is a lot of fun. Make a drawing that shows what you did during your vacation this summer.")

The children began a barrage of questions, "Pero que hacemos? Usamos las crayolas o los marcadores? Teacher, usted me puede ayudar a dibujar un barco? No se'que hacer." ("But what do we do? Do we use the crayons or the markers? I don't know what to do. Teacher, can you help me draw a boat?")

"Wow!" thought Ms. Peters. "So many questions for such an easy assignment."



Teaching and Learning Styles



- All individuals have their own learning styles and approaches to educational experiences.
 - Age, cultural environment, and the family's beliefs and training mold the child into a certain type of learner, which is reflected by his or her cognitive behavior in the classroom.
 - When home beliefs are incongruent with those of the teacher and culture of the American classroom, misunderstandings occur.



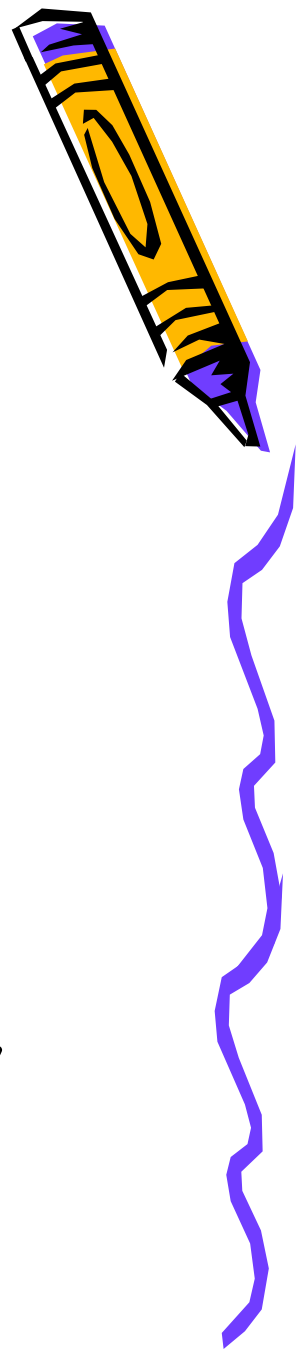
Teaching and Learning Styles



- Children who come from cultures that promote independence are often "field-independent," which suggests that their learning styles may be more analytical and independent.
- Gollnick and Chin (1998) mentioned that children who are less assimilated into the dominant society (with the exception of Asian Americans) may have the tendency to be global or "field-sensitive" learners.



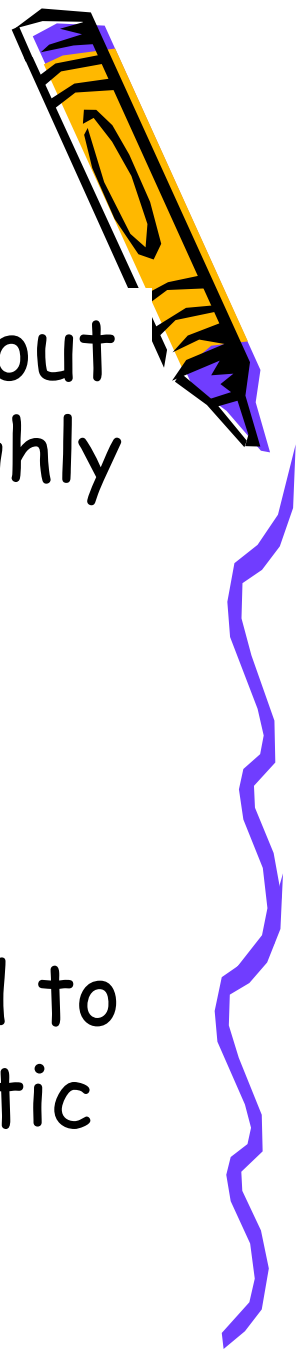
Teaching and Learning Styles



- Teachers and students who understand each other's expectations can expect fewer cultural collisions that disturb the educational process. Students can become bored, unresponsive, discouraged, or test poorly if they are uncomfortable in class
- (Felder and Henriques, 1995).



Teaching and Learning Styles



- Various researchers have pointed out that Asian students tend to be highly visual learners
 - (Ehrman and Oxford, 1995; Reid, 1995).
- Hispanics are generally auditory learners
- Non-Westerners are more inclined to learn through tactile and kinesthetic modes



Relationship to Peers

Field-Independent Behavior

- Prefers to work independently
- Likes to compete and gain individual recognition
- Is task-oriented; is inattentive to social environment when working
- Social atmosphere is secondary

Field-Sensitive Behavior

- Likes to work with others to achieve a common goal
- Likes to assist others
- Is sensitive to feelings and opinions of others



Personal Relationship to Teacher



Field-Independent Behavior

- Rarely seeks physical contact with teacher
- Is formal; restricts interactions with teacher to tasks at hand

Field-Sensitive Behavior

- Openly expresses positive feelings for teacher
- Asks questions about teacher's tastes and personal experiences; seeks to emulate the teacher



Instructional Relationship to Teacher



Field-Independent Behavior

- Likes to try new tasks without help from the teacher
- Impatient to begin tasks
- Likes to finish first
- Seeks nonsocial rewards
- Teacher uses formulas, charts, and graphs to instruct
- Learners prefer trial and error

Field-Sensitive Behavior

- Seeks guidance and demonstration from the teacher
- Seeks rewards that strengthen relationship with the teacher
- Is highly motivated when working individually with teacher
- Teacher expresses approval
- Teacher instructs primarily by modeling
- Teacher provides personal rewards
- Teacher holds informal discussions in class
- Teacher is sensitive to students' problems



Characteristics of Curriculum that Facilitate Learning



Field-Independent Behavior

- Emphasizes details of concepts
- Parts have meaning of their own
- Teaches math and science concepts based on the discovery approach
- Emphasizes facts and principles
- Focuses on instructional objectives
- Encourages competition and independent achievement. which are approached analytically

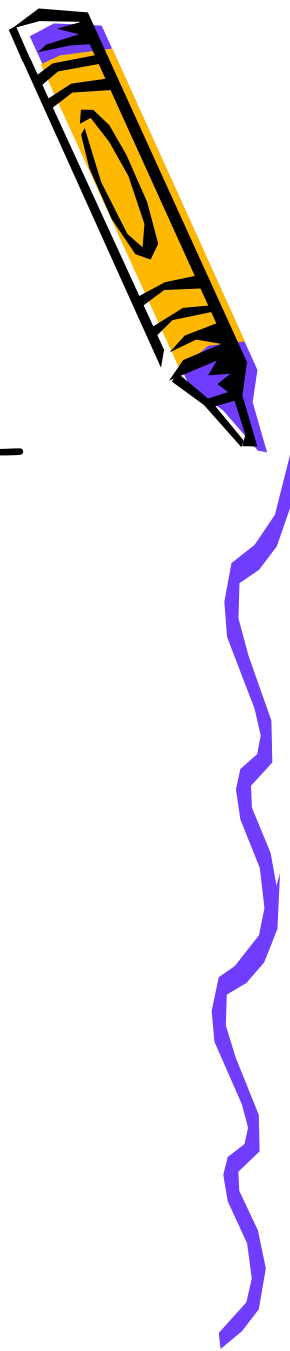
Field-Sensitive Behavior

- Explains performance objectives and global aspects of curriculum carefully
- Presents concepts in humanized story format
- Relates concepts to personal interests and experience of students
- Approaches learning in a global perspective
- Personalizes curriculum based on human needs of the learner



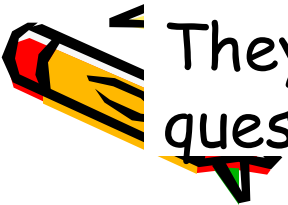
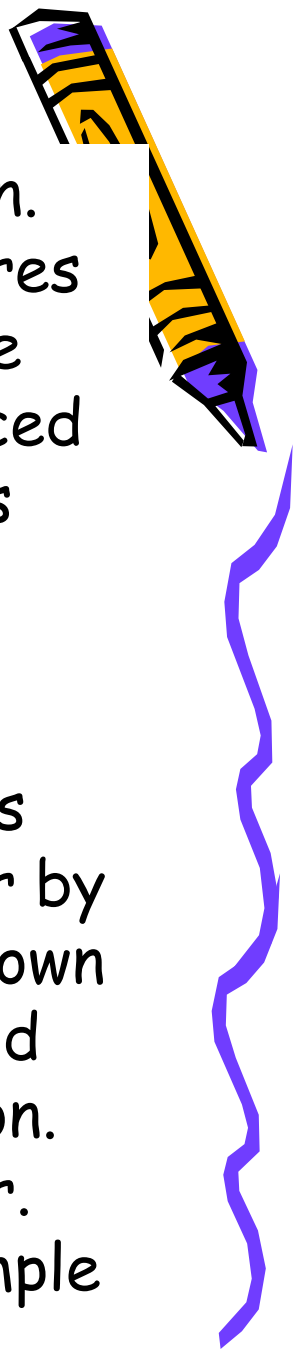
Your Turn

- Are you field-independent or field-sensitive?
 - As a student?
 - As a teacher?



Scenario

Mr. Cooper is the new teacher on the reservation. He has great respect for Native American cultures and appreciates the opportunity to work with the children of this nation. He has carefully introduced the concept of his lesson, and feels sure that his students understand what is being taught. He decides to test comprehension and directs a question to Running Bear, who does not know the answer. In an effort to help him, Mr. Cooper asks Sara, his brightest student, to help Running Bear by giving him the answer. Sara just puts her head down and does not answer. Mr. Cooper calls on one child after another, but no one will answer the question. Mr. Cooper is confused by his students' behavior. They are deliberately refusing to answer the simple question.

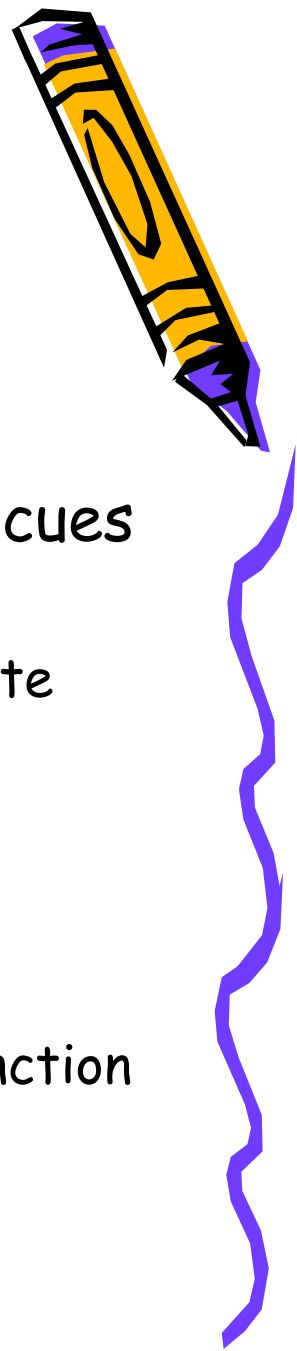


Caution

- Beware of thinking that merely understanding a culture is enough
 - Every family is unique, with its own set of traditions and values.
 - Every individual has their own idiosyncrasies.



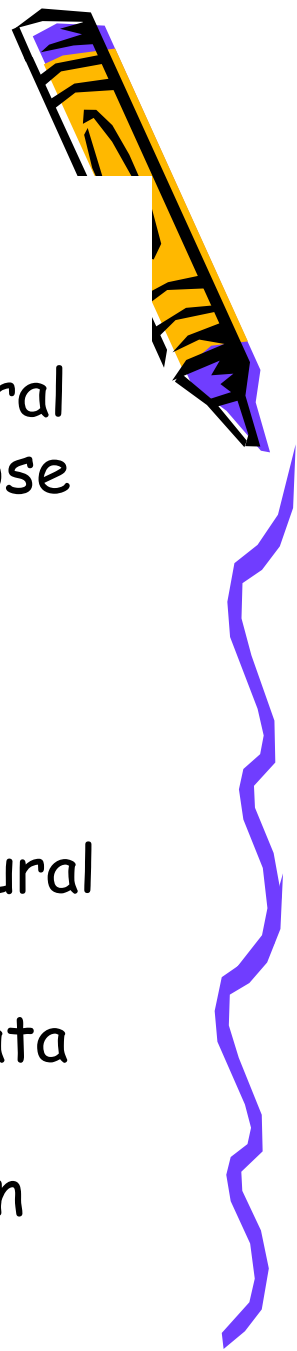
Points to Remember



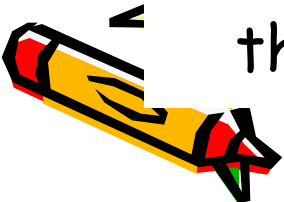
- Teaching and learning styles reflect cultural backgrounds .
- Students who have teachers from their same culture have little problem understanding the cues provided by the teacher.
 - Students will already be familiar with the appropriate interactional behaviors expected in the classroom .
- With proper instruction, field-dependent and field-independent students can learn to be bicognitive;
 - that is, their learning styles can be expanded to function appropriately in any given situation .



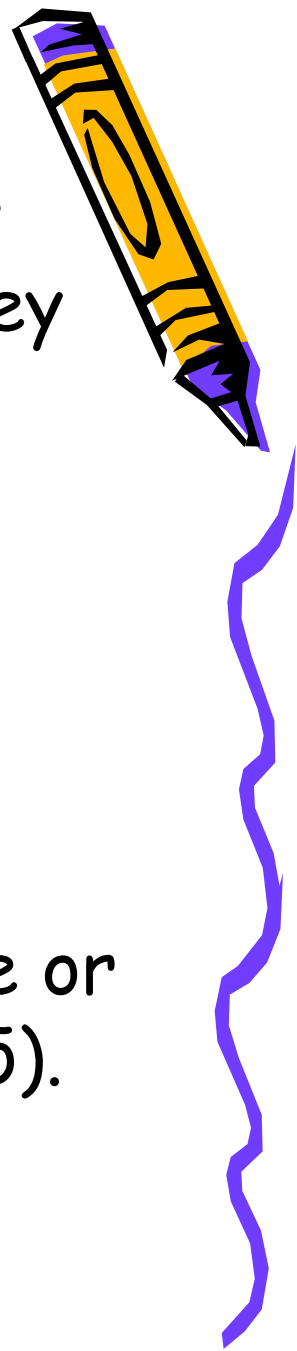
Points to Remember



- Teachers need to provide activities that incorporate all types of learning styles .
- Teachers need to be aware of their own cultural learning styles and preferences, as well as those of their students .
- Stereotyping can happen when false and exaggerated characteristics of a group are attributed to the individual, but **sociotyping** involves an accurate generalization about cultural groups as a whole.
- If teachers misinterpret the learning style data and make decisions based on incorrect assumptions, students can be hurt or limited in their school experience .



Points to Remember



- Mainstream teachers are often at odds with their diverse students because they are unaware of the differing cultural values they bring to the classroom .
- Teachers need to plan curriculum and instruction to incorporate the learning styles of their students .
- If students are uncomfortable in class, they may become bored or unresponsive or test poorly (Felder and Henriques, 1995).

